**RA BRIEF**
**FLORIDA ASSUMPTION OF STATE 404 PROGRAM**

**Date Updated:** 2/21/2019 **Date Original Prepared:** 8/8/2018 **Priority:** 3

**EPA Goal Supported:** Cooperative Federalism, Rule of Law and Process

**Issue:** 404 Assumption by the State of Florida

**Location**: State of Florida

**Context:**

1. Involved Parties: EPA, Corps, USFWS, NMFS, FDEP.
2. Interested parties: Florida Governor, the White House, other states, media, and various stakeholders (mining, developers, Tribes, environmental NGOs).
3. Florida is working on an official request to assume administration of a CWA section 404 program. Before making their request, Florida must pass a rule that will set up the required program elements. The Florida rulemaking timeline and possible legal challenges to that rulemaking, resolution of ESA coordination processes, and finalizing the Corps/FDEP MOA which identifies which waters the state will assume and which waters the Corps will retain, are currently driving the timeline.
4. Key outstanding issues include: **Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)**

**Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)**

5. EPA continues to work with Florida and other stakeholders to address issues and finalize documents (e.g., Memoranda of Agreement) necessary for FL to complete its assumption package.

**Critical Messages:**

1. EPA is prepared to begin our review immediately upon receipt of a package from Florida (i.e., drafted Federal Register Notice for public review and comment period and a public hearing, transmittal letters to other federal agencies, Tribal consultation letters, etc.).
2. Assisting FDEP with the development of a 404 assumption program remains a high priority for Region 4. EPA staff are actively communicating with Florida staff to help ensure the State's process for submission and EPA's review process will be conducted as efficiently as possible.
3. Legal challenges to the currently proposed state rule could delay Florida's timeline for submittal. Florida staff have indicated they intend to proceed with a Notice of Proposed Rule as the next step in their rulemaking process for 404 assumption. If FDEP submits a package prior to the rule being deemed lawfully adopted the package would not meet the requirements of a complete package.
4. Upon receipt of a complete request package, EPA's 120-day statutory review must include a public hearing, a 45-day public comment period, and consideration of comments received from the public, USACE, USFWS, and NMFS.
5. Some stakeholders are interested in using ESA § 7 consultation where threatened and endangered species may be impacted, but § 7 is only triggered by federal agency actions. Region 4 staff drafted language now incorporated in the EPA-FDEP MOA regarding coordination procedures for proposed 404 projects for which there is a reasonable potential for federally listed species to be impacted. HQ has drafted a five-agency MOA (EPA, DOI/FWS, FDEP, NMFS, and USACE) to address ESA coordination (OGC

lead). An EPA and DOI/FWS working group met for the first time on 10/10 to discuss ESA coordination procedures. A smaller core EPA-DOI/FWS working group met several times thereafter in an attempt to reach agreement on a path forward and language for ESA coordination. Consideration of the path forward now rests at high levels within EPA (Deputy GC) and DOI. In December, OGC senior leadership discussed the 404 program and the proposed ESA MOA with DOI senior leadership. At that time they also prepared briefing materials to be used to brief the DOI Secretary. Region 4 staff understand from discussions with OGC that Deputy GC Fotouhi sent the briefing papers to DOI on 2/5/19. At this time R4 staff have not heard any updates.

6. Florida and the Corps of Engineers are negotiating a memorandum of agreement, which among other things will identify the River and Harbors Act Section 10 waters to be retained by the Corps of Engineers and the administrative boundary for adjacent wetlands to such waters. The Corps has provided FDEP with a draft Retained Waters List, which was shared with EPA and is currently under review. One other outstanding issue identified is responsibility (Corps vs. FDEP) for processing modifications of existing Corps permits. This was a topic of discussion when FDEP met with the Corps OGC on 12/17 to discuss the MOA. FDEP indicated there was a follow-up call the week of 1/28. The Corps' current stance is that they would be responsible for administrative modifications and FDEP would be responsible for any modification that changes the scope of discharge or impacts.
7. The Clean Water Act specifically limits state-issued 404 permits to fixed terms no longer than five years. However, there is significant interest in determining how to review projects that by their nature have durations greater than five years. For Corps-issued 404 permits of more than five years, EPA has in the past sought periodic review (e.g., every five years) of ongoing activities. FDEP's draft rule 62-331 addresses this with long-term planning review required for the first permit proposed for large projects.
8. Florida has developed implementation procedures regarding their process for delineating wetlands, which provides clarity regarding the relationship between waters of the state and waters of the United States. With the most recent revision, FDEP staff addressed EPA concerns; they plan to incorporate the implementation strategy into the program description component of their request submittal.

**Considerations:**

*Components of FDEP's draft assumption package not yet shared with the EPA*

1. EPA understands that FDEP intends to share some draft documents with EPA for informal review ahead of package submission, which we believe may include the following:
    a. Draft letter from the Governor;
    b. Draft complete program description (e.g., resources needed to administer the program, updated regulatory cross-walk (draft shared on Sep 17), final delineation implementation strategy)
    c. Updated Attorney General Statement (EPA provided feedback on an initial draft shared on Sep 6);
    d. Updated version of draft MOA between the State and the Corps;
    e. Updated version of draft MOA between EPA and the State;
    f. Updated version of the rules that FDEP intends to use to implement the program (pre-review draft shared on Sep 14-17). EPA provided pre-review comments on Sep 20, Oct 5 and Oct 9.
2. The next FDEP-EPA in-person meeting, which will include review of draft submission documents, has not been scheduled.

*EPA-Florida MOA*

1. During meetings in Tallahassee on September 5-7, and via communications since then, FDEP agreed to include minor revisions (to bring the MOA into closer alignment with federal regulations) and EPA's proposed ESA language, with the exception of a sentence that acknowledged that the Corps may designate FDEP as a non-Federal representative for the purposes of informal ESA consultation.
2. FDEP shared copies of the revised draft MOA with the Corps, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Marine Fisheries Service between Sep 14 and 18.
3. OGC proposed edits to the draft MOA, which were transmitted by the RA to FDEP on Nov 2. Additional changes regarding the ESA language may ultimately be needed, depending on the outcome of the five-way MOA that is under development.
4. In the event that additional revisions to the MOA may be warranted as FDEP proceeds with developing its assumption program, particularly regarding ESA coordination, EPA staff recommend that the MOA should not be signed until the State is closer to having a complete package that is ready to submit.

*Corps-Florida MOA*

1. FDEP received an updated draft Retained Waters List from the Corps, which was shared with EPA and is currently under review.
2. The Corps and FDEP have not reached closure on who will have responsibility for making modifications to currently active Corps permits in assumed waters, which potentially has implications for the long-term (i.e., > 5-year) permits issued by the Corps. The Corps' current stance is that they would be responsible for administrative modifications and FDEP would be responsible for any modification that changes the scope of discharge or impacts.
3. The draft MOA now provides clarity that permits are required for civil works projects in assumed waters that are not subject to 404(r).
4. OGC drafted revisions to the Corps-Florida MOA in coordination with R4 and OW staff. The EPA transmitted the suggested revisions to FDEP on Nov 2 and to the Corps on Nov 8. FDEP staff asked EPA staff for clarification on some of the suggested revisions but did not express any opposition or preference regarding EPA's recommendations. The Corps Jacksonville District staff informed EPA staff that they reviewed EPA's suggested revisions and shared comments internally with the office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army, but they did not share their perspectives on EPA's comments.

**FLORIDA ASSUMPTION OF STATE 404 PROGRAM**

**Location Visual**: Water Management Districts of Florida

**Expanded Facts:**

1. A complete assumption package must include:
    - Letter from the Governor requesting the program
    - A complete program description (e.g., regulatory cross-walk, wetland delineation methodology)
    - Attorney General Statement, or a statement from the attorney for those State or interstate agencies which have independent legal counsel (likely FDEP General Counsel)
    - Memorandum of Agreement between the State and EPA
    - Memorandum of Agreement between the State and the Corps
    - Copies of all applicable State statutes and regulations

*Timelines*

2. FDEP has changed the rule language regarding long-term planning, and in response to EPA comments provided. The draft rule is awaiting signature by FDEP's Secretary Valenstein, which will be followed by review by the Governor's OFARR. EPA staff understand that the draft rule has been with the FDEP Secretary since October. The publication of the NOPR would initiate the three-week public comment period (to be followed by a week for a public hearing).
3. Legal challenges to Florida's rule are generally viewed as likely, which could add 60 days for a single challenge to several months for multiple challenges.
4. EPA has 120 days to review a state's assumption request. **This includes a requirement for **at least a 45-day public comment period** after Federal Register notification, and **at least one public hearing**.**

    EPA receives state's request to assume program

    EPA determines program submission is complete & so notifies state

EPA provides copies of State's submission to Corps, FWS, & NMFS (HQ & regional)
- Corps, FWS, & NMFS comments due within 90 days

EPA initiates consultation with tribes per Executive Order (timeline not specified)

Notices of complete application: Federal Register, newspapers, interested parties
- FR Notice triggers 45-day public comment period
- Public hearing(s) 30+ days after FR Notice publication
- ****Florida has requested in writing that EPA hold multiple public hearings.****

EPA reviews & considers comments received.
- Prepares summary of significant comments, response to such comments
- Responds individually to comments from Corps, FWS, & NMFS

If EPA approves, notify state & publish approval in Federal Register

*ESA*

5. ESA § 7 consultation is triggered by federal agency actions. Incidental take *statements* are a possible outcome of § 7 consultation (vs. incidental take *permits* under § 10 procedures, which are triggered by non-federal actions).
6. Only a federal Service (FWS or NMFS) can issue biological opinions and incidental take statements or permits.
7. Under ESA § 7 regulations a federal action agency may designate a non-federal representative to conduct informal consultation or prepare a biological *assessment* (vs. opinion) (50 CFR § 402.08). If a permit or license applicant is involved and is not the designated non-federal representative, then the applicant and federal agency must agree on the choice of the designated non-federal representative. The ultimate responsibility for compliance with ESA § 7 remains with the federal agency.
8. ESA § 10 procedures are triggered by actions of non-federal entities (e.g., states). ESA regulations require writing a Habitat Conservation Plan (requiring time and resources) when seeking an incidental take permit, and FWS policy also involves internal consultation, taking additional time. ESA § 10 consultation can result in an incidental take permit (vs. incidental take statement under § 7).
9. HQ (OGC lead) has drafted a five-agency MOA, to include EPA, DOI/FWS, FDEP, NMFS, and the Corps, to address ESA coordination, which was shared with R4 and FWS on Oct 17.
10. An EPA and DOI/FWS working group met for the first time Oct 10 to discuss ESA coordination procedures, and met several times thereafter in an attempt to reach agreement on ESA coordination procedures and MOA language. Consideration of the path forward now rests at high levels within EPA (Deputy GC) and DOI. A high-level call was held Wednesday 12/12, with DOI asking for one-pagers on 404 Assumption and the five-agency MOA with which to brief the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of DOI. R4's ORC and WPD supported OGC with preparation of this information, which was provided to Deputy GC Fotouhi on 12/19. Region 4 staff understand from OGC staff that Mr. Fotouhi planned to send the briefing papers to DOI on Feb 5. At this time R4 staff have not heard any updates.

*CWA five-year permit limit*

11. **Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)**

12. **Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)**

*Communication with Stakeholders*

13. R4 staff received a letter on 2/20/19 from the Conservancy of Southwest Florida stating they would like to be considered an interested party regarding FDEP's potential application for assumption. Accordingly, they wish to be notified by mail pursuant to 40 CRF 233.15(e) when EPA provides notice to the public that we received a complete package and are seeking comment. R4 staff drafting a response for the WPD Director's signature.